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Editorial

NEW ALLIES

At one of the state universities, the professor of classics reports that a student taking work with him was thus reproved by a fellow-student: "Why do you take that stuff? All the best educators say there is nothing in it. *I* came here to learn to sew, cook, and dance." There could be no better arraignment of the policies that are degrading university standards than this ingenuous statement; but that matter is too large to be considered here. Attention is directed especially to the phrase: "All the best educators say there is nothing in it."

Whatever the fact may be, it is unfortunately true that this remark reflects only too well the sentiment that is abroad in the land regarding the attitude of leaders in the field of education. For all practical purposes it makes little difference whether this sentiment is well grounded or not: the mere fact that it is generally accepted constitutes one of the most serious menaces that endanger the cause of the classics.

On the strength of it, even a single determined man, or a group of two or three such men, will undertake, by virtue of official position, to crowd Latin out of the high-school curriculum through the length and breadth of an entire state. And Dr. Flexner, who shows by his writings that he is not at all acquainted with present-day methods and aims in teaching Latin, is able to persuade the General Education Board to deal the subject a heavy blow by

excluding it, untried and unheard, from an experimental school where the merits of almost every subject are to be tested under the most favorable conditions that money can provide.

We heartily rejoice in every improvement that is made in methods of Latin instruction and in the preparation of teachers; and, during the last few years, much has been done in the way of bringing home to parents the educational value of the study of Latin. But all this is comparable to attempting to ladle back with a spoon what others are drawing out with a bucket. If we wish really to make headway in this matter, it will be necessary to attempt to reach directly those who, in administrative positions high and low, have influence in shaping the high-school course.

A campaign of education of this sort cannot, of course, be conducted through the medium of journals devoted to the interests of the classics. But teachers of Greek and Latin can assist here by publishing, in non-classical journals, judicious articles setting forth present aims and methods. Most of the attacks upon Latin protest against "monkish tradition," or hold the Latin teacher up to ridicule as a charlatan who proposes to work a miracle by the "discipline" of a year or two of Latin. Apparently many even in high educational positions would sustain a shock of surprise if taken into a school where Latin is being taught with a scientific attempt to utilize to the utmost its bearing upon English, for example. Such methods, if known, could not but commend themselves to many who now thoroughly misunderstand the situation.

Something can be accomplished in this way; but, after all, what we ourselves say in defense of our own house is subject to discount. We need the help of expert allies. Are there such, or is it really true that "all the best educators say there is nothing in it"? Certainly there are allies, and many more of them than we think. One reason why we do not hear from them is that radicals always push forward to the front of the stage and make a great deal more noise than the solid conservatives. It is our task to find these allies, and to show them how they can help us.

For example, there is the vexed question of "mental discipline." Rather extensive reading in current periodicals suggests to the writer that often people who discuss this subject are not talking

about the same thing at all, and that, if the matter were set forth clearly by an expert, it might be found that there is little ground for real difference of opinion as to the results of the study of Latin by up-to-date methods. How large a service would be rendered to the cause at this point by an open-minded and friendly expert in psychology, whose findings could not be supposed to be in any way influenced by considerations of interest!

Even a sentence from an acknowledged authority may count for much. Some time ago Professor G. M. Stratton, of the University of California, a well-known expert in psychology, wrote the following, when asked for an opinion: "It would be a grave mistake to suppose that the experimental work has proved that the idea of mental discipline is no longer tenable." And within a month or two, Professor A. F. Lange, dean of the School of Education in the same university, when writing to express his cordial approval of an article on "The Cumulative Argument for the Study of Latin" (*School and Society*, December 2, 1916), adds the following in regard to the possibilities of training in Latin: "Just because it is so radial in the specific disciplines it can be made to furnish (the results of which are transferable, at least to things that are human), Latin as an educational means has virtues that other subjects have not." It must be obvious that, within the range of the influence of these two men, the quotation of these statements would put a serious stumbling-block in the way of a reckless "reformer" who wanted to overturn the curriculum of a school on the basis of some popular but unproved theory.

It usually happens that teachers of the classics are closely enough in touch with the situation to be able to find out with little difficulty how local professors of psychology and education stand in relation to this matter. So also with superintendents of instruction and other administrative officers. It is hoped within a few months to launch a systematic plan for finding new allies in these fields and for enlisting their services. The need for an aggressive forward movement is urgent; and, when the call comes, teachers will have an opportunity to render the cause a signal service in gathering the information that will be called for.

H. C. N.